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THE WESTMINSTER CLASSICS. —— II.

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON:

TWENTY-THREE SELECTED POEMS.

LONDON: THE ATHENÆUM LITERATURE DEPARTMENT, 10, ADELPHI TERRACE, W.C.2.

Xmas 1919

APPRECIATIONS.

"Mr. Gibson has forged a poetic method which is capable of managing, without violence, and with the constant achievement of beauty, the everyday laborious existence of those who are engaged in common trades. Whatever the future will think of this poetic method, the attempt, we are bold to assert, will be reckoned of first-rate importance when the literary history of the twentieth century comes to be written. This revelation (it is nothing less) of the profound poetry in the lives of factory hands, miners, navvies, fishermen, and casual labourers in town slums and villages is bound to be effective in the literature that is to come. That there is poetry in these lives has often been vaguely affirmed—in general terms and without conviction; but no one before Mr. Gibson has set it down with exactitude of truth and beauty."—*Lascelles Abercrombie* in *Daily News*.

"What is the quality which Mr. Gibson's work possesses? What is it that gives to these formidably direct studies of human labour, and to this bare, undecorated writing, the peculiar significance which we recognise as poetry? One word is enough for the answer, and it is, Form. The innate coherence in the procession of outward things does, of course, constitute something which, in æsthetic terms, may be called the natural form of the world; and the elucidation of this, or even some manner of perfecting it into a stricter coherence than actuality affords, may effect a certain species of artistic form; it may roughly be called prose form. But such form does not give the mind its highest satisfaction. For that we require a kind of form that is really quite independent of external actuality; we require the work of a formative impulse that can completely dissolve the shows of things and all their real relationships, and, while preserving these, yet recrystallize the whole affair into a new—indeed, into an ideal—sort of existence; a sort of existence which, just because its manner does triumphantly satisfy this need for form, thereby seems charged with desirable significance. It is the kind of form which occurs typically in music; and it is entirely on the creation of this kind of form that Mr. Gibson relies, and, we think, relies with notable success, for turning commonplace life (if any life is commonplace) into the strange, disturbing life of poetry."—*The Times Literary Supplement*, in a two-column article on Mr. Gibson's poetry.

"The main thing about these poems is just that they are extraordinary poems; by means of their psychology, no less and no more than by means of their metre, their rhyme, their intellectual form and their concrete imagery, they pierce us with flashing understanding of what the war is and means—not merely what it is to these individual pieces of ordinary human nature who are injured by it and who yet dominate it, but, by evident implication, what the war is in itself, as a grisly multitudinous whole. It seems to us beyond question that Mr. Gibson's 'Battle' is one of the most remarkable results the war has had in literature."—*The Nation* (on "*Battle*.")

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peasants, sailors, shopkeepers, mechanics, and the like, is the material in which he shapes forth *his vision of life's significance.* And it is plain that, in an age which is apt to believe that poetry and reality are antithetical terms, such uncompromising fusion of the two must be work of the highest value. For the significance Mr. Gibson reads into, or rather, quite strictly, creates in, this every-day prosaic life, is not that which propagandism too easily provides, but the significance of simple, inevitable, tragic morality. There are not many writers living who can reach with such quiet effort the secrets of human nature which lie hidden behind habit and conduct and reasoning. The reader will be disappointed if he reads Mr. Gibson's work in the hope of exciting detail or curious form. What he will find is a remarkable power of creating form as a whole, which perhaps too scrupulously avoids the distraction of detail ; and a power of enclosing in that form a wonderfully *humane* poetry."

Included in this selection are several poems which relate to the great war, in which Mr. Gibson served as a private soldier. These occupy a distinctive place, especially in that they emphasise the outrage inflicted by war upon that human personality, to the value of which "Daily Bread" and "Fires" drew attention. "Battle" and "Friends" are indeed a "monument to the wantonness of it all, to the cheapness of life in war, the carelessness as to the individual, the disregard alike of promise and performance, the elimination of personality."*

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the kindness of Mr. Elkin Mathews in allowing me to reprint poems from "Daily Bread," "Fires," "Thoroughfares," "Borderlands," "Battle," and "Friends" ; and to Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for permission to include the poems from "Livelihood" and "Whin." All these are copyright, both in this country and in America (in the latter case by the Macmillan Company, of New York).

E. E. T.

**Times Literary Supplement*, October 14th, 1915.

Twenty-Three Poems.

PRELUDE TO *DAILY BREAD.*

As one, at midnight, awakened by the call
  Of golden plovers in their seaward flight,
Who lies and listens, as the clear notes fall
  Through tingling quiet of the frosty night;
Who lies and listens, till the wild notes fail;
  And then, in fancy, following the flock
Fares over slumbering hill and dreaming dale,
  Until he hears the surf on reef and rock
Break, thundering; and all sense of self is drowned
  Within the mightier music of the deep,
And he no more recalls the piping sound
  That startled him from dull, undreaming sleep:
So I, first waking from oblivion, heard,
  With heart that kindled to the call of song,
The voice of young life, fluting like a bird,
  And echoed that wild piping; till, ere long,
Lured onward by that happy, singing flight,
  I caught the stormy summons of the sea,
And dared the restless deeps that, day and night,
  Surge with the life-song of humanity.

SIGHT.

By the lamplit stall I loitered, feasting my eyes
On colours ripe and rich for the heart's desire—
Tomatoes, redder than Krakatoa's fire,
Oranges like old sunsets over Tyre,
And apples golden-green as the glades of Paradise.

And as I lingered, lost in divine delight,
My heart thanked God for the goodly gift of sight,
And all youth's lively senses keen and quick . . .
When suddenly, behind me in the night,
I heard the tapping of a blind man's stick.

GERANIUMS.

Stuck in a bottle on the window-sill,
In the cold gaslight burning gaily red
Against the luminous blue of London night,
These flowers are mine; while somewhere out of sight
In some black-throated alley's stench and heat,
Oblivious of the racket of the street,
A poor old weary woman lies in bed.

Broken with lust and drink, blear-eyed and ill,
Her battered bonnet nodding on her head,
From a dark door she clutched my sleeve and said:
"I've sold no bunch to-day, nor touched a bite . . .
Son, buy six-penn'orth; and 'twill mean a bed."

So, blazing gaily red
Against the luminous deeps
Of starless London night,
They burn for my delight:
While somewhere, snug in bed,
A worn old woman sleeps.

And yet to-morrow will these blooms be dead
With all their lively beauty; and to-morrow
May end the light lusts and the heavy sorrow
Of the old body with the nodding head.
The last oath muttered, the last pint drained deep,
She'll sink, as Cleopatra sank, to sleep;
Nor need to barter blossoms for a bed.

SOLWAY FORD.

He greets you with a smile from friendly eyes
But never speaks, nor rises from his bed:
Beneath the green night of the sea he lies,
The whole world's waters weighing on his head.

The empty wain made slowly o'er the sand;
And he, with hands in pockets, by the side
Was trudging, deep in dream, the while he scanned
With blue, unseeing eyes the far-off tide:
When, stumbling in a hole, with startled neigh
His young horse reared; and, snatching at the rein,

He slipped: the wheels crushed on him as he lay;
  Then, tilting over him, the lumbering wain
Turned turtle as the plunging beast broke free,
  And made for home: and pinioned and half-dead
He lay, and listened to the far-off sea;
  And seemed to hear it surging overhead
Already: though 'twas full an hour or more
  Until high-tide, when Solway's shining flood
Should sweep the shallow firth from shore to shore.
  He felt a salty tingle in his blood;
And seemed to stifle, drowning. Then again,
  He knew that he must lie a lingering while
Before the sea might close above his pain,
  Although the advancing waves had scarce a mile
To travel, creeping nearer, inch by inch,
  With little runs and sallies over the sand.
Cooped in the dark, he felt his body flinch
  From each chill wave as it drew nearer hand.
He saw the froth of each oncoming crest,
  And felt the tugging of the ebb and flow,
And waves already breaking over his breast,
  Though still far-off they murmured, faint and low,
Yet creeping nearer, inch by inch; and now
  He felt the cold drench of the drowning wave,
And the salt cold of death on lips and brow;
  And sank, and sank . . . while still, as in a grave,
In the close dark beneath the crushing cart,
  He lay, and listened to the far-off sea.
Wave after wave was knocking at his heart,
  And swishing, swishing, swishing ceaselessly
About the wain—cool waves that never reached
  His cracking lips, to slake his hell-hot thirst . . .
Shrill in his ear a startled barn-owl screeched . . .
  He smelt the smell of oil-cake . . . when there burst
Through the big barn's wide-open door, the sea—
  The whole sea sweeping on him with a roar . . .
He clutched a falling rafter, dizzily . . .
  Then sank through drowning deeps, to rise no more.
Down, ever down, a hundred years he sank
  Through cold green death, ten thousand fathom deep.
His fiery lips deep draughts of cold sea drank
  That filled his body with strange icy sleep,

Until he felt no longer that numb ache—
  The dead-weight lifted from his legs at last:
  And yet he gazed with wondering eyes awake
  Up the green glassy gloom through which he passed:
And saw, far overhead, the keels of ships
  Grow small and smaller, dwindling out of sight;
And watched the bubbles rising from his lips;
  And silver salmon swimming in green night;
And queer big, yellow skate with scarlet fins
  And emerald eyes and fiery-flashing tails:
Enormous eels with purple-spotted skins;
  And mammoth unknown fish with sapphire scales
    That bore down on him with red jaws agape,
  Like yawning furnaces of blinding heat;
And when it seemed to him as though escape
  From those hell-mouths were hopeless, his bare feet
Touched bottom: and he lay down in his place
  Among the dreamless legion of the drowned,
The calm of deeps unsounded on his face,
  And calm within his heart; while all around
Upon the midmost ocean's crystal floor
  The naked bodies of dead seamen lay,
Dropped, sheer and clean, from hubbub, brawl and roar,
  To peace too deep for any tide to sway.

. . . . .

The little waves were lapping round the cart
  Already, when they rescued him from death.
Life cannot touch the quiet of his heart
  To joy or sorrow, as, with easy breath,
And smiling lips, upon his back he lies,
  And never speaks, nor rises from his bed;
Gazing through those green glooms with happy eyes,
  While gold and sapphire fish swim overhead.

THE SHOP.

Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, went the bell,
As I pushed in; and, once again, the smell
Of groceries, and news-sheets freshly-printed,
That always greeted me when I looked in

To buy my evening-paper: but, to-night,
I wondered, not to see the well-known face,
With kind, brown eyes, and ever-friendly smile,
Behind the counter; and to find the place
Deserted at this hour, and not a light
In either window. Waiting there a while,
Though wondering at what change these changes hinted,
I yet was grateful for the quiet gloom—
Lit only by a gleam from the back-room,
And, here and there, a glint of glass and tin—
So pleasant, after all the flare and din
And hubbub of the foundry: and my eyes,
Still tingling from the smoke, were glad to rest
Upon the ordered shelves, so neatly dressed
That, even in the dusk, they seemed to tell
No little of the hand that kept them clean,
And of the head that sorted things so well
That naught of waste or worry could be seen,
And kept all sweet with ever-fresh supplies.

And, as I thought upon her quiet way,
Wondering what could have got her, that she'd left
The shop, unlit, untended, and bereft
Of her kind presence, overhead I heard
A tiptoe creak, as though somebody stirred,
With careful step, across the upper floor:
Then all was silent, till the back-room door
Swung open; and her husband hurried in.
He feared he'd kept me, waiting in the dark,
And he was sorry: but his wife who served
The customers at night-time usually—
While he made up the ledger after tea,
Was busy, when I . . . Well, to tell the truth,
They were in trouble, for their little son
Had come in ill from school . . . the doctors said
Pneumonia . . . they'd been putting him to bed:
Perhaps, I'd heard them, moving overhead,
For boards would creak and creak, for all your care.
They hoped the best; for he was young; and youth
Could come through much; and all that could be done
Would be . . . then he stood, listening, quite unnerved,
As though he heard a footstep on the stair,
Though I heard nothing: but at my remark

About the fog and sleet, he turned,
And answered quickly, as there burned
In his brown eyes an eager flame:
The raw and damp were much to blame:
If but his son might breathe West-country air!
A certain Cornish village he could name
Was just the place; if they could send him there,
And only for a week, he'd come back stronger . . .
And then, again, he listened: and I took
My paper, and went, afraid to keep him longer;
And left him standing with that haggard look.

Next night, as I pushed in, there was no tinkle:
And, glancing up, I saw the bell was gone;
Although, in either window, the gas shone;
And I was greeted by a cheery twinkle
Of burnished tins and bottles from the shelves:
And now, I saw the father busy there
Behind the counter, cutting with a string
A bar of soap up for a customer,
With weary eyes, and jerky, harassed air,
As if his mind were hardly on the task:
And when 'twas done, and parcelled up for her,
And she had gone; he turned to me, and said:
He thought that folks might cut their soap themselves . . .
'Twas nothing much . . . but any little thing,
At such a time . . . And, having little doubt
The boy was worse, I did not like to ask;
So picked my paper up, and hurried out.

And, all next day, amid the glare and clang
And clatter of the workshop, his words rang;
And kept on ringing, in my head a-ring;
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .
And kept on chiming to the anvil's chime:
But any little thing . . . at such a time . . .
And they were hissed and sputtered in the sizzle
Of water on hot iron: little thing . . .
At such a time: and, when I left, at last,
The smoke and steam; and walked through the cold drizzle,
The lumbering of the 'buses as they passed
Seemed full of it; and to the passing feet,
The words kept patter, patter, with dull beat.

I almost feared to turn into their street,
Lest I should find the blinds down in the shop:

And, more than once, I'd half-a-mind to stop,
And buy my paper from the yelling boys,
Who darted all about with such a noise
That I half-wondered, in a foolish way,
How they could shriek so, knowing that the sound
Must worry children, lying ill in bed . . .
Then, thinking even they must earn their bread,
As I earned mine, and scarce as noisily!
I wandered on; and very soon I found
I'd followed where my thoughts had been all day,
And stood before the shop, relieved to see
The gases burning, and no window-blind
Of blank foreboding. With an easier mind,
I entered slowly; and was glad to find
The father by the counter, 'waiting me,
With paper ready and a cheery face.
Yes! yes! the boy was better . . . took the turn,
Last night, just after I had left the place.
He feared that he'd been short and cross last night . . .
But, when a little child was suffering,
It worried you . . . and any little thing,
At such a moment, made you cut up rough:
Though, now that he was going on all right . . .
Well, he'd have patience, now, to be polite!
And, soon as ever he was well enough,
The boy should go to Cornwall for a change—
Should go to his own home; for he, himself,
Was Cornish, born and bred, his wife as well:
And still his parents lived in the old place—
A little place, as snug as snug could be . . .
Where apple-blossom dipped into the sea . . .
Perhaps, to strangers' ears, that sounded strange—
But not to any Cornishman who knew
How sea and land ran up into each other;
And how, all round each wide, blue estuary,
The flowers were blooming to the water's edge:
You'd come on blue-bells like a sea of blue . . .
But they would not be out for some while yet . . .
'Twould be primroses, blowing everywhere,
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses . . .
You'd never half know what primroses were,
Unless you'd seen them growing in the West;
But, having seen, would never more forget.

Why, every bank, and every lane and hedge
Was just one blaze of yellow ; and the smell,
When the sun shone upon them, after wet . .
And his eyes sparkled, as he turned to sell
A penny loaf and half-an-ounce of tea
To a poor child, who waited patiently,
With hacking cough that tore her hollow chest:
And, as she went out, clutching tight the change,
He muttered to himself: It's strange, it's strang
That little ones should suffer so . . . The ligh
Had left his eyes: but, when he turned to me,
I saw a flame leap in them, hot and bright.
I'd like to take them all, he said, to-night !

And, in the workshop, all through the next day,
The anvils had another tune to play . . .
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses:
The bellows puffing out: It's strange, it's strange
That little ones should suffer so . . .
And now, my hammer, at a blow:
I'd like to take them all, to-night !
And, in the clouds of steam, and white-hot glow,
I seemed to see primroses everywhere,
Primroses, and primroses, and primroses.
And, each night after that, I heard the boy
Was mending quickly ; and would soon be well:
Till one night I was startled by the bell:
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, loud and clear ;
And tried to hush it, lest the lad should hear.
But, when the father saw me clutch the thing,
He said, the boy had missed it yesterday ;
And wondered why he could not hear it ring ;
And wanted it ; and had to have his way.
And then, with brown eyes burning with deep joy,
He told me, that his son was going West—
Was going home . . . the doctor thought,
next week,
He'd be quite well enough: the way was long ;
But trains were quick ; and he would soon be there:
And on the journey he'd have every care,
His mother being with him . . . it was best,
That she should go: for he would find it strange,
The little chap, at first . . . she needed
change . . .
And, when they'd had a whiff of Western air !
'Twould cost a deal ; and there was naught to spare:

But, what was money, if you hadn't health:
And, what more could you buy, if you'd the
wealth . . .
Yes! 'twould be lonely for himself, and rough;
Though, on the whole, he'd manage well enough:
He'd have a lot to do: and there was naught
Like work to keep folk cheerful: when the hand
Was busy, you had little time for thought;
And thinking was the mischief . . . and 'twas
grand
To know that they'd be happy. Then the bell
Went tinkle-tinkle; and he turned to sell.

One night he greeted me with face that shone,
Although the eyes were wistful; they were gone—
Had gone this morning, he was glad to say:
And, though 'twas sore work, setting them away,
Still, 'twas the best for them . . . and they
would be
Already in the cottage by the sea . . .
He spoke no more of them; but turned his head;
And said he wondered if the price of bread . . .
And, as I went again into the night,
I saw his eyes were glistening in the light.

And, two nights after that, he'd got a letter:
And all was well: the boy was keeping better;
And was as happy as a child could be,
All day with the primroses and the sea,
And pigs! Of all the wonders of the West,
His mother wrote, he liked the pigs the best.
And now the father laughed until the tears
Were in his eyes, and chuckled: Aye! he knew
Had he not been a boy there once, himself?
He'd liked pigs, too, when he was his son's years.
And then, he reached a half-loaf from the shelf;
And twisted up a farthing's worth of tea,
And farthing's worth of sugar, for the child,
The same poor child who waited patiently,
Still shaken by a hacking, racking cough.

And, all next day, the anvils rang with jigs:
The bellows roared and rumbled with loud laughter,
Until it seemed the workshop had gone wild,
And it would echo, echo, ever after
The tune the hammers tinkled on and off,
A silly tune of primroses and pigs . . .

Of all the wonders of the West
He liked the pigs, he liked the pigs the best!

Next night, as I went in, I caught
A strange, fresh smell. The postman had just brought
A precious box from Cornwall, and the shop
Was lit with primroses, that lay atop
A Cornish pasty, and a pot of cream:
And, as, with gentle hands, the father lifted
The flowers his little son had plucked for him,
He stood a moment in a far-off dream,
As though in glad remembrances he drifted
On Western seas: and, as his eyes grew dim,
He stooped, and buried them in deep, sweet bloom:
Till, hearing, once again, the poor child's cough,
He served her hurriedly, and sent her off,
Quite happily, with thin hands filled with flowers.
And, as I followed to the street, the gloom
Was starred with primroses; and many hours
The strange, shy flickering surprise
Of that child's keen, enchanted eyes
Lit up my heart, and brightened my dull room.

Then, many nights the foundry kept me late
With overtime; and I was much too tired
To go round by the shop; but made for bed
As straight as I could go: until one night
We'd left off earlier, though 'twas after eight,
I thought I'd like some news about the boy.
I found the shop untended; and the bell
Tin-tinkle-tinkle-tinkled all in vain.
And then I saw, through the half-curtained pane,
The back-room was a very blaze of joy:
And knew the mother and son had come safe back.
And, as I slipped away, now all was well,
I heard the boy shriek out, in shrill delight:
"And, father, all the little pigs were black!"

THE RAGGED STONE.

As I was walking with my dear, my dear come back at last,
The shadow of the Ragged Stone fell on us as we passed:

And if the tale be true they tell about the Ragged Stone
I'll not be walking with my dear next year, nor yet alone.
And we're to wed come Michaelmas, my lovely dear and I;
And we're to have a little house, and do not want to die.
But all the folk are fighting in the lands across the sea,
Because the King and counsellors went mad in Germany.
Because the King and counsellors went mad, my love and I
May never have a little house before we come to die.

And if the tale be true they tell about the Ragged Stone
I'll not be walking with my dear next year, nor yet alone.

HAGGIE KNOWE.

By Raven Burn and Carlin Tooth,
She came at last to Hartshorn Pike;
Then, turning east to Haggie Knowe,
She rested in a rushy syke—

She rested in a rushy syke
And laid her baby in the fern;
And low and sad the song she sang
Beside the tumbling burn.

"Lie still, my sorrow, in the fern—
For no man ever spoke the truth,
If he were lying when we came
That day by Carlin Tooth.

"From Raven Burn to Carlin Tooth
He swore that he'd be true to me—
And sure he's lying dead in France,
Or under the deep sea.

"He's lying under the deep sea,
Who lay all night upon my breast;
Your father's lying cold and still—
Lie still, my grief, and rest."

THE MACHINE.

SINCE Thursday he'd been working overtime,
With only three short hours for food and sleep,
When no sleep came, because of the dull beat
Of his fagged brain ; and he could scarcely eat.
And now, on Saturday, when he was free,
And all his fellows hurried home to tea,
He was so dazed that he could hardly keep
His hands from going through the pantomime
Of keeping-even sheets in his machine—
The sleek machine that, day and night,
Fed with paper, virgin white,
Through those glaring, flaring hours
In the incandescent light,
Printed children's picture-books—
Red and yellow, blue and green,
With sunny fields and running brooks,
Ships at sea, and golden sands,
Queer white towns in Eastern lands,
Tossing palms on coral strands—
Until at times the clank and whirr and click,
And shimmer of white paper turned him sick ;
And though at first the colours made him glad,
They soon were dancing in his brain like mad ;
And kept on flaring through his burning head :
Now, in a flash, the workshop, flaming red ;
Now blazing green, now staring blue ;
And then the yellow glow too well he knew :
Until the sleek machine, with roar and glare,
Began to take him in a dazzling snare ;
When, fascinated, with a senseless stare,
It drew him slowly towards it, till his hair
Was caught betwixt the rollers ; but his hand,
Almost before his brain could understand,
Had clutched the lever ; and the wheels wer
stopped
Just in the nick of time ; though now he dropped,
Half-senseless on the littered workshop floor :
And he'd lain dazed a minute there or more,
When his machine-girl helped him to a seat.
But soon again he was upon his feet,
And tending that unsatisfied machine ;
And printing pictures, red and blue and green,
Until again the green and blue and red
Went jigging in a riot through his head ;

And, wildest of the raging rout,
The blinding, screeching, racking yellow—
A crazy devil of a fellow—
O'er all the others seemed to shout.
For hands must not be idle when the year
Is getting through, and Christmas drawing near,
With piles on piles of picture-books to print
For people who spend money without stint:
And, while they're paying down their liberal gold,
Guess little what is bought, and what is sold.

But he, at last, was free till Monday, free
To sleep, to eat, to dream, to sulk, to walk,
To laugh, to sing, to whistle, or to talk . . .
If only, through his brain, unceasingly,
The wheels would not keep whirring, while the smell—
The oily smell of thick and sticky glaze
Clung to his nostrils, till 'twas hard to tell
If he were really out in the fresh air;
And still before his eyes, the blind, white glare,
And then the colours dancing in his head,
A maddening maze of yellow, blue and red.
So, on he wandered in a kind of daze,
Too racked with sleeplessness to think of bed
Save as a hell, where you must toss and toss,
With colours shooting in insane criss-cross
Before wide, prickling, gritty, sleepless eyes.

But, as he walked along the darkening street,
Too tired to rest, and far too spent to eat,
The swish and patter of the passing feet,
The living, human murmur, and keen cries,
The deep, cool shadows of the coming night,
About quick-kindling jets of clustered light;
And the fresh breathing of the rain-washed air,
Brought something of sweet healing to his mind;
And, though he trailed along as if half-blind,
Yet often on the pavement he would stop
To gaze at goods displayed within a shop;
And wonder, in a dull and lifeless way,
What they had cost, and who'd the price to pay.
But those two kinds of shop which, as a boy,
Had been to him a never-failing joy,
The bookshop and the fruitshop, he passed by,
As if their colours seared his wincing eye;

For still he feared the yellow, blue and red
Would start that devil's dancing in his head.
And soon, through throngs of people, almost gay
To be let loose from work, he pushed his way ;
And ripples of their careless laughter stole
Like waves of cooling waters through his soul,
While sometimes he would lift his aching eyes,
And see a child's face, flushed with proud surprise
As, gripping both its parents' hands quite tight,
It found itself in fairylands of light,
Walking with grown-up people through the night
Then, turning, with a shudder he would see
Poor painted faces, leering frightfully,
And so drop back from heaven again to hell.

And then, somehow, though how he scarce cou
tell,
He found that he was walking through the throng
Quite happy, with a young girl at his side—
A young girl apple-cheeked and eager-eyed ;
And her frank, friendly chatter seemed a song
To him, who ne'er till now had heard life sing.
And youth within him kindled quick and strong,
As he drank in that careless chattering.
And now she told to him how she had come
From some far Northern Isle to earn her bread ;
And in a stuffy office all day long,
In shiny ledgers, with a splitting head,
She added dazzling figures till they daneed,
And tied themselves in wriggling knots, and prance
And scrambled helter-skelter o'er the page:
And, though it seemed already quite an age
Since she had left her home, from end to end
Of this big town she had not any friend:
At times she almost dreaded she'd go dumb,
With not a soul to speak to ; for, at home
In her own Island, she knew everyone . . .
No strangers there ! save when the tinkers came,
With pots and pans aglinting in the sun—
You saw the tin far off, like glancing flame,
As all about the Island they would roam . . .
Then, of themselves at home, there were si
brothers,
Five sisters, with herself, besides the others—
Two homeless babes, whom, having lost the
mothers,

Her mother'd taken in among her own . . .
And she in all her life had hardly known
Her mother with no baby at her breast . . .
She'd always sing to hush them all to sleep ;
And sang, too, for the dancing, sang to keep
The feet in time and tune ; and still sang best,
Clean best of all the singers of the Isle.
And as she talked of home, he saw her smile,
With happy, far-off gaze ; and then as though
In wonder how she'd come to chatter so
To this pale, grave-eyed boy, she paused, half shy ;
And then she laughed, with laughter clear and true ;
And looked into his eyes ; and he laughed too,
And they were happy, hardly knowing why.

And now he told her of his life, and how
He too had been nigh friendless until now.
And soon he talked to her about his work ;
But, when he spoke of it, as with a jerk,
The light dropped from his eyes. He seemed to slip
Once more in the machine's relentless grip ;
And hear again the clank and whirr and click ;
And see the dancing colours and the glare ;
Until his dizzy brain again turned sick ;
And seeing him look round with vacant air,
Fierce pity cut her to the very quick ;
And as her eyes with keen distress were filled,
She touched his hand ; and soon her kind touch stilled
The agony : and so, to bring him ease
She told more of that Isle in Northern seas,
Where she was born, and of the folks at home :
And how, all night, you heard the wash of foam . . .
Sometimes, on stormy nights, against the pane
The sousing spray would rattle just like rain ;
And oft the high-tides scoured the threshold clean . . .

And, as she talked, he saw the sea-light glint
In her dark eyes : and then the sleek machine
Lost hold on him at last ; and ceased to print :
And in his eyes there sprang a kindred light,
As, hand in hand, they wandered through the night.

SUMMER DAWN.

Persons : Laban Carpenter, *a hind.*
Betty Carpenter, *his wife.*

Scene : Laban Carpenter's *cottage, before dawn.* Laban *still lies in bed, dozing ; but his wife is already dressed ; and is setting the kettle on a newly-lit fire. In the bed, beside* Laban, *is a six-month old baby ; and, in another bed, are five children, all under the age of seven ; the boys sleeping at one end, the girls at the other.*

Betty. Come, lad, get up, or we'll be late.
Laban. So soon, lass. What o'clock is it ?
Betty. It's getting on for three.
The fire is kindling famously:
I'll have the kettle boiling in a twinkling.
We'll have a sup of tea, before we start,
To keep the bitter chill out.
It's raw work, turning out, these dewy mornings.
Laban. It seems but half-an-hour ago,
Since I lay down in bed.
Betty. Nay, Laban, it was half-past ten,
At most, when you turned in.
You'd scarcely got your trousers off,
Before you dropt asleep ;
And, you were snoring, like a pig,
Until I turned you off your back.
'Twas nigh eleven, when I got to bed.
Laban. I can't tell how you manage.
A man must have his sleep out,
If he's to do his day's work:
But, women, somehow, seem . . .
Betty. Come, lad, don't lie there, talking:
But, stir yourself . . .
Laban. My back is nearly broken.
Betty. Aye, some folks' backs are broken easily.
Laban. You call it easily !
It's easy, hoeing turnips, every night,
Until it is too dark to see our feet ;
And then, to start again, at dawn:
And Summer-nights so short !
Betty. If Summer-nights were longer,
Your children would go shoeless through the Winter.

Laban. And still, it's heavy on a man,
As well as all his day's work.
Betty. Have I no day's work, too?
Your day's work will not keep you, housed and fed—
You, and your wife, and children.
And if your father'd talked like that,
Lad, where would you be now?
He can have been no lie-abed:
He'd not a lazy bone in all his body.
You've heard him boast, a hundred times:
"Though I have had bad seasons,
I've not done far amiss:
Since I have reared eleven men and women."
Aye! and your mother, crippled with rheumatics,
For more than half her lifetime:
And only him to do the housework
And see to all the lot of you,
And keep you decent, single-handed,
Until the girls were old enough,
As well as all his day's work.
You talk of day's work!
Why, I've heard him tell,
How, once, to save the corn,
He worked a week, without a wink of sleep:
All day, at his own job in Stobshill mine:
And, all night, helping in the harvest-field.
Laban. And then, he slept . . .
Betty. He slept his fill:
But, not till all was harvested.
He saved the corn.
Laban. Aye: somehow, fathers . . .
Betty. You're a father, too:
And should think shame to lie and grumble there;
And only be too glad that we are able
To earn a little extra in the Summer,
To tide us over Winter.
Laban. True, wife, true!
And yet, it's hard that, in an honest day's work,
A strong man cannot earn enough
To keep his wife and family.
Betty. Twelve shillings won't go far,
With rents so high,
And food, and clothes, and firing.
But, I have nought to grumble at:
I only have six babes to feed:
My mother had thirteen;

And ten of us were born
After my father lost his sight,
While blasting in the quarry.
And she'd three babes-in-arms, at once—
The twins, and Dick.
I've heard her say that, ere the boy was born,
While she lay sick in bed, and near her time,
Her two, poor helpless babies at the bed-foot
Sat up, with big eyes, watching her,
As good as gold ;
And she, poor woman, wondering
How ever she would nurse the three, at once.
I cannot think how she got through, at all:
But, when I used to ask her, she would answer:
" Aye ! looking back, you wonder how you managed ;
But, at the time, each single thing you do for them
Makes you yourself so happy,
That you think nothing of it."
And mother had the truth of things.
And we're quite rich to her—
She'd hoe, a summer's day, for sixpence:
And spent her life's best years in picking stones.
She only had one holiday,
That ever I heard tell of:
And that, when she'd been married fourteen years.
She went to see her cousin at the Stell:
And rode both ways in Farmer Thompson's pig-cart ;
And, ever afterwards, she said:
She couldn't tell why folks liked holidays,
Or why they need go seeking happiness,
While they had homes to work in ;
And that, for her part, she found little pleasure
In sitting still all day,
In other people's houses, with cold legs,
And idle, folded hands,
When there was darning to be done at home,
And one's own hearth to sit by ;
Though there was little sitting down for her,
At any time at all.
She couldn't rest ;
Up first, and last to bed,
I never saw her quiet, till the end.
She always hoped that death would find her working.
Her wish was granted her . . .
Death found her at the job she liked the best . . .
The clothes she washed that week were left for me
to iron . . .

Aye, mother knew what hardship was ;
And laboured, day and night, to rear her children.
Laban. It's ever children, children !
A woman slaves her very life away
To rear her children ;
And they grow up and slave their lives away
To rear their children.
We little thought, lass, when we married !
Do you remember the fine Summer-nights,
When first we walked together ?
Ah, those were happy times !
We little thought. . . .
Betty. You little thought ;
I knew.
Yes ; those were happy times ;
No girl was ever happier than I was,
When first I walked with you in Malden Meadows,
Laban :
But I am happy now, for all the difference.
Life was not over easy, even then ;
They worked me sorely, at the farm,
Though I was but a child.
On Monday mornings, we were up at one,
To get the washing through,
Before the day's work started.
I wasn't fifteen then ; but I remember
The coastguards whistling to us,
As they passed the lighted window,
On the cold, black Winter-mornings.
And often, I'd been working many hours
Before you turned out with your team.
I used to think that you went bravely, Laban,
Behind your dappled horses.
Laban. Aye ! then, I little knew—
I little knew that life was labour, labour,
And labour till the end.
I thought that there'd be ease, somewhere. (Rises and begins to dress.)
Betty. If men will marry, and have children,
They must not look for ease.
Yet, husband, you'd not be a boy again,
Unwedded. . .
Laban. Nay ! I couldn't do without you.
Betty. But, you've too many children ?
Too many hungry mouths to fill,

Too many little feet to keep in leather !
And can you look upon them, sleeping there,
(My father ne'er set eyes on me, poor fellow !)
And talk like that ?
And is it Tommy you would be without ?
You've had him longest ; and perhaps you're tired . . .

Laban. Nay, wife : he was the first ;
And you were such a girl—just seventeen !
And I, but two years older.
Do you remember, lass, how proud . . .

Betty. Or is it Nell, who brings your bait to you ?

Laban. She grows more like her mother every day.

Betty. It must be Robin, then,
That all the neighbours say takes after you.

Laban. He's got my temper, sure enough,
The little Turk !

Betty. Or Kit and Kate, the twins ?
They're surely twice too much for you.

Laban. Folk say that never such a pair
Was seen in all the countryside.

Betty. There's just the baby left.
Poor little mite, so you're the one too many !

Laban. Come, Betty, come !
Enough of teasing !
You know that I was only talking :
I'm ready, now, for work.

Betty. The kettle's boiling. (She makes the tea and fills two mugs.)
Drink it up ;
'Twill help to keep the chill out.

Laban. Aye ; but it's dank work, hoeing swedes at dawn.

Betty. The sun will soon be up.

Laban. The sun gets up a deal too soon for me.

Betty. Nay ; never rail against the sun.
I'd sooner, lad, be shut away from you,
Than from the sunshine, any day.
I'll never hear a word against the sun.

(*They take up their hoes from behind the door, give a last look at their sleeping children, and go out together into the dawn.*)

DEAF.

THIS day last year I heard the curlew calling
By Hallypike,
And the clear tinkle of hill-waters falling
Down slack and syke.

But now I cannot hear the shrapnel's screaming,
The screech of shells:
And if again I see the blue lough gleaming
Among the fells,

Unheard of me will be the curlew's calling
By Hallypike,
And the clear tinkle of hill-waters falling
Down slack and syke.

HIS FATHER.

I quite forgot to put the spigot in.
It's just come over me. . . . And it is queer
To think he'll not care if we lose or win,
And yet be jumping mad about that beer.

I left it running full. He must have said
A thing or two. I'd give my stripes to hear
What he will say if I'm reported dead
Before he gets me told about that beer!

VICTORY.

I watched it oozing quietly
Out of the gaping gash.
The lads thrust on to victory
With lunge and curse and crash.

Half-dazed, that uproar seemed to me
Like some old battle-sound
Heard long ago, as quietly
His blood soaked in the ground.

The lads thrust on to victory
With lunge and crash and shout,
I lay and watched, as quietly
His life was running out,

THE MESSAGES.

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . ."

Back from the trenches, more dead than alive,
Stone-deaf and dazed, and with a broken knee,
He hobbled slowly, muttering vacantly:

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench, and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . .

"Their friends are waiting, wondering how they thrive—
Waiting a word in silence patiently . . .
But what they said, or who their friends may be

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . ."

Back.

They ask me where I've been,
And what I've done and seen;
But what can I reply
Who know it wasn't I,
But someone just like me,
Who went across the sea,
And with my head and hands
Killed men in foreign lands, . . .
Though I must bear the blame
Because he bore my name?

THE NIGHT-SHIFT.

Persons: Jenny Craster, *Robert Craster's wife.*
Tamar Craster, *Robert Craster's mother.*
Maggie Thomson, *a neighbour.*
Lizzie Thomson, *her daughter.*

Scene : ROBERT CRASTER'S *cottage, in the early morning.* JENNY CRASTER *lies in bed, her new-born baby by her side. Her eyes are closed, and she seems barely conscious.* TAMAR CRASTER *stands at the door talking with* MAGGIE THOMSON.

TAMAR. My son !
But, hush !
She must not hear ;
'Twould be the death of her.
'Twill take her all her time, poor lass,
To pull through as it is.
And, if she heard her husband . . .
But 'tis not true . . .
Oh, say it is not true !
MAGGIE. Aye, Tamar, it is true enough ;
And there's but little hope
That any man will leave the pit alive.
TAMAR. My son !
She must not hear a whisper ;
The news would kill her, and her newborn babe.
MAGGIE. Sooner or later,
She must know, poor soul !
TAMAR. Aye, but not yet ;
For she's in need of sleep.
When there's no help,
And she must know,
Then 'twill be time enough
To break the news to her.
Perhaps, when she has slept a bit,
She will be strong to bear much
That's now beyond her strength.
MAGGIE. Well, I'm away !
My man has gone already
To see if there's a chance of doing aught.
Thank God, he's on the day-shift !
If he'd been in the pit . . .
But he was sleeping soundly,
Beside me, snug in bed,
Until the rumbling roused us ;
When he leapt up and ran
Nigh naked to the pit.
I had to stay and hush the children
To sleep again ;
The noise had startled them.
And then I came to tell you.

There's scarce a body left
In all the village.
The cottages were empty,
And every door ajar,
As I came by ;
For all the women-folk
Have run to the pit-head.
And I must go ;
I cannot stay behind,
Not knowing what is happening.
If there is any news,
I'll bring you word ;
Although 'tis feared
There's little hope of rescue.

[*She goes out, closing the door behind her.*]

TAMAR. Robert, my son !
But I must breathe no word,
Lest she should hear.
She must not know my son's in peril ;
For he's her husband.
The women-folk are gathered round the shaft—
Poor wives and mothers,
Waiting and watching,
And hoping against hope.
Would that I, too, watched with them—
A mother 'mid the mothers—
To share with them what little hope there may be.
But I must bide at home,
Alone with her I dare not speak to,
Or breathe a word of all my fears to.
Nay, I must keep them to myself,
Even though my heart . . .
My son's in danger,
Yet I dare not go . . .
No longer he belongs to me alone ;
For he's her husband, and a father now ;
And I must stay
To tend his wife and son.

JENNY (*opening her eyes and speaking in a whisper*).
Is Robert not home yet ?

TAMAR. Nay, daughter . . .
He's not home yet.

JENNY. What time is it ?

TAMAR. 'Tis nearly . . .
Nay . . .

[*She goes to the clock on the wall and holds the pendulum until it stops.*]

The clock has stopt.
JENNY. I thought I heard it ticking ;
Though now I cannot hear it.
Still, it seems almost light ;
And he should not be long.
How pleased he'll be to have a boy !
I hope that they'll not tell him,
Before he reaches home.
I'd like to see his face,
When first he learns
That he's the father of a son.
He'll soon be home . . . be home . . .
My babe !
He'll be so pleased.
I hope . . .
That they'll not tell him . . .
TAMAR. Nay . . . they'll not tell . . .
But you must not talk now,
For you're too weakly,
And should save yourself,
Until . . .
JENNY. Until he comes.
Yes, I'll lie very quiet,
And save myself, that I may see him,
When he first learns . . .
But there's a sound of tapping . . .
Do you not hear it ?
TAMAR. Nay, lass, I hear nothing.
JENNY. I thought it was the clock.
TAMAR. The clock has stopt.
JENNY. It must be in my head then . . .
It keeps on tapping . . . tapping . . .
He'll soon be home.
But I'm so tired,
And cannot keep awake.
I'll sleep . . .
Till he comes home.
And, Tamar, you'll be sure to waken me
The moment he comes home ?
You'll not forget ?
TAMAR. Nay, lass, I'll not forget.
JENNY (*drowsily sinking back into unconsciousness*). It keeps on tapping . . . tapping . . .
Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

TAMAR. Till he comes home . . .
Ah, God, how shall I tell her!
For I must tell her soon;
I cannot keep it from her long.
And I, his mother,
Must be the first to tell his wife
That he . . .
But he may come yet . . .
And she must know naught now.
For she's too weakly,
And 'twould kill her outright;
And, after all,
He may come home again,
Before there's any need to tell her aught.
When there's no help,
And she must know,
Then 'twill be soon enough . . .
She'll have a longer spell than I
To bear it . . .
She is young;
And I . . . I seem quite old,
So suddenly!
She said she heard a sound of tapping . . .
She might have heard my heart almost,
It beat so loudly at my side
While she was speaking of my son,
Her husband,
And wondering, poor soul . . .
But, may he not come safe home after all?
She may speak truly, when she says
He'll soon be home.
And yet . . .
She heard a sound of tapping . . .
While I heard nothing—
Nothing save my heart
My old heart dinning in my ears.

JENNY *(sitting up suddenly in bed and gazing into vacancy)*. Hark!

There it is again . . .
A sound of tapping . . .
I hear it tapping, tapping . . .
Like a pick . . .
Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

TAMAR. A pick . . .
Ah, God!

Nay, daughter ; there is nothing.
You must lie quiet now,
Or you . . .

JENNY. Tap . . . tap . . .
It goes on tapping, tapping
In the dark . . .
'Tis dark . . . so dark ;
And I can scarcely breathe,
The darkness lies so heavily upon me,
As though I wandered somewhere underground,
With all the earth above me,
With great rocks hanging overhead,
So close that my hair brushes them,
Although I cannot see them ;
And I can touch them with my hand . . .
Oh, they are falling, falling . . .
I've pulled them down on me . . .
The great black rocks . . .

[*She sinks back exhausted*].

TAMAR. Nay, lass, you're lying in your bed,
Your own warm bed,
Beside your little son.

JENNY (*drowsily*). My little son !
When he comes home
He'll be so pleased . . .
But still I hear a sound
Of tapping . . .
Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

[*She dozes over.*]

TAMAR. My son !
Nay, there's no hope,
For she hears something . . .
Something that I cannot.
The wife's heart hears
What the old mother's may not,
Because it beats too loudly.

[*She sits for a while gazing into the fire.*]

JENNY (*sitting up again suddenly*). Will no one stop that tapping ?
I cannot sleep for it.
I think that some one is shut in somewhere,
And trying to get out.
Will no one let them out,
And stop the tapping ?

It keeps on tapping, tapping . . .
Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .
And I can scarcely breathe,
The darkness is so thick,
It stifles me,
And weighs so heavily upon me,
And drips, and drips . . .
My hair is wet already ;
There's water all about my knees.
I cannot see it,
But I feel it creeping,
Higher and higher,
Cold as death, about me ;
I cannot see it,
But I hear it swishing
At every step,
And feel it dripping cold—
The darkness dripping down upon me,
So cold, so cold.
And yet . . . I cannot breathe . . .
The darkness is so thick, so hot,
'Tis like a furnace blast
Upon my brow,
And weighs so heavily,
As though great rocks were hanging overhead !
And dripping, dripping . . .
I cannot lift my feet,
The water holds them,
'Tis creeping . . . creeping . . . creeping . . .
My wet hair drags me down.
Ah, God !
Will no one stop that tapping . . .
I cannot sleep . . .
And I would sleep
Till he comes home . . .
Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .
[*Sinks back exhausted.*]

TAMAR. O God, have mercy on her . . . and on me !
She hears,
And yet,
She knows not what she hears,
But I,
Though I hear nothing,
I know all.
Robert, my son !

JENNY (*starting up again*). I cannot breathe . . .
The darkness is so thick—
So thick and hot,
It stifles me . .
Ah, God ! Ah, God !
The darkness is ablaze,
The rocks are falling, falling . . .
The great, black, dripping rocks . . .
And I am falling . . .

[*A pause.*]

And there's some one tapping,
As though they would be in.
Why don't you let him in ?
It is my husband ;
He would see his son—
His firstborn son.
Can you not hear a tapping, tapping ?
'Tis like the tapping of a pick . . .
Tap . . . tap . . .
But it grows fainter ;
Now I cannot hear it.
The darkness has come down on me.
I sink . . . I sink . . .

[*She lies back exhausted.*]

TAMAR. She does not hear it now.
And now . . . it almost seems
As if . . . my heart had stopt . . .
I cannot breathe . . .
But she is sleeping soundly,
And sleep will give her strength.
She's scarcely slept,
Since he was born—
The poor wee babe !—
And he is sleeping too.
I would that I were in as deep a slumber,
For I am weary . . .
Yet, how could I sleep ?
They sleep,
Because they do not know,
But I . . . I know.
Robert, my son !

[*She sits gazing into the fire. After a while* JENNY *wakens and looks about her.*]

JENNY. My little son,
Your father 'll soon be home.

He'll be so pleased . . .
But he should be home now,
For it is light.
Has Robert not come home yet ?

TAMAR. Not . . . yet . . .

JENNY. What time . . .

TAMAR. The clock has stopt.

JENNY. I wonder what can keep him.
It is light.

TAMAR. Nay, woman, 'tis not light yet.
'Tis dark . . . quite dark . . .
You're weakly still ;
And you've been wandering ;
And now you're talking foolishness.
You must not speak ;
But go to sleep again,
And waken well and strong.

JENNY. It seems quite light . . .

TAMAR. Nay . . . it is dark . . . God knows !

JENNY (*drowsily*). I think that I could sleep again—
Sleep . . . till he comes.

[*She sinks into a deeper slumber.* TAMAR *sits for a while, gazing into the fire with vacant eyes. Suddenly she speaks, her voice little more than a whisper, and tries to rise, but falls forward on to the hearthrug, and lies motionless.*]

TAMAR. 'Tis dark . . . quite dark . . .
Robert . . . my son !

[*Time passes ; presently a sound of voices is heard without ; the door opens quietly, and* MAGGIE THOMSON *enters, followed by her daughter,* LIZZIE.]

MAGGIE. Tamar . . . where are you ?
Quick, lass, . . . she's fallen !
She must have fainted . . .
The shock . . .

[*They turn* TAMAR'S *face to the light and loosen her bodice.*]

O God !
She does not breathe ;
Her heart has failed her.
And I—
I left her here alone . . .
His mother . . .

LIZZIE. The clock has stopt.
MAGGIE. Look to the wife . . .
She may . . .
LIZZIE. She's sleeping quietly.
MAGGIE. Poor Jenny!
And her babe is fatherless.
LIZZIE. He's snuggled to her breast,
And sleeping soundly.
A fine big boy he is.

THE OPERATION.

Persons: William Lowry, *a printer.*
Hester Lowry, *his wife.*
Letty Lowry, *their daughter.*

Scene: *A room in tenements, late at night.* William Lowry *sits with his coat off, in an armchair, smoking and reading a newspaper. The door opens, and* Hester Lowry *enters. Over her arm is a basket, laden with purchases, which she lays on the table with a sigh.*

William. You're late to-night.
You should have let me come with you:
That basket's heavy, wife.
Hester. 'Twas not the basket, William:
I was kept.
William. What kept you, wife?
The shops would not be thronged, to-night.
Hester. I finished with the shops, three hours ago.
I had to await my turn.
William. Your turn?
Who kept you waiting?
Hester. The doctors, husband.
William. Doctors, wife?
Hester. I thought 'twas time to have the thing away:
And so, I went to see.
The doctors shook their heads;
And said, next week it might have been too late . . .

William. Too late? What ails you, wife? I never knew . . .

Hester. They say it's cancer.
They were very kind;
And wanted me to stay, to-night,
And have it done, at once.
They'd hardly let me leave.
I said, I must come home to see you first.
They'll take me in to-morrow.

William. To-morrow, wife! And I . . I never knew.
You must have guessed, before you went . . .

Hester. Yes, lad; I knew: and 'twas no shock to me;
I've known so long.

William. So long! . . . and never told me!
But, lass, the pain . . .

Hester. Aye; it was bad to bear.
At first I scarce could keep from crying out;
But, as the years went by . . .

William. The years! You've had the pain for years?

Hester. Aye, off and on.
It's full eleven years since first I felt it.

William. And, from the first, you knew . . .

Hester. I knew.
My father died of it.

William. Eleven years! And never breathed a word,
Nor murmured once, but patiently . . .

Hester. I come of fisherfolk, who live on patience.
It's little use for any man
To be impatient with the sea.

William. And I . . . I never guessed.
I've seen you, day by day,
And slept, each night, beside you, in the bed;
And yet, you never breathed a word . . .

Hester. Nay, lad; I've kept the thing from you:
'Twould not have eased the pain to share it.
You slept the sounder, knowing nothing;
Though, there were times the gnawing was so bad,
I could have torn . . .

William. And I slept on, unknowing!
You never even wakened me.
And every little ache I've had,
I've made a pretty song about it!
Hester. You've made a song!
And what about the time your arm was caught . .
Was caught in the machine, and you were hanging . . .
Were hanging by the flesh, a mortal hour!
William. Nay; Michael held me up upon his back.
Hester. But, all that time, your arm was in the wheels;
And you . . . you never murmured, once, they say;
But, only laughed, and jested;
Although they had to take a chisel,
And cut each cog out separately,
Before the flesh was freed.
How could you bear the strain and jar,
And never once lose heart,
I cannot think; and your poor arm . . .
Your poor, poor arm, with all the sinews torn . . .
William. I've never really played the fiddle since:
I've got to make the notes, that used to come.
But you, wife, all these years . . .
And I slept on . .
Hester. 'Twould not have eased . . .
William. But, if I'd known,
You should have had the doctor at the first.
Hester. I knew you could not spare me then:
Those were not easy times:
You, laid off idle through your accident,
And Letty, but a baby:
And we had both enough to do
To keep the home together.
I hoped, at least, to keep things going
Till I should be past doing things.
The time has come . . .
But I . . . I've saved a bit:
And Letty's thirteen past,
And finished schooling,
And old enough to manage for you.
Is she in bed?

William. She went an hour ago.
She wanted sorely to wait up for you;
But she was sleepy, so I wouldn't let her.
Hester. Aye, she's been at it all day long;
And she's a handy lass,
And will do well enough for you
Until . . . until . . .
William. Does Letty know?
Hester. Nay, she knows nothing, William:
And I'll not tell her now ti l morning.
I would not spoil her sleep.
Poor child, she little dreams!
But she's a plucky girl,
And I have taught her everything:
And she can cook, and scrub, and wash,
As well as any woman.
You'll scarcely miss me . .
William. Wife!
Hester. I've seen to all your clothes,
And there are shirts and stockings
To last for many weeks,
To last until . . .
I mayn't be long away.
William. O, wife, it's terrible . . .
cannot think . . .
It seems so strange that all these years . . .
Hester. You never saw my father:
He suffered long, poor fellow,
But never rightly knew that it was cancer,
Till very nigh the end.
It laid him low at last,
When he was far from home,
After the herring in the Western seas.
The doctor said he must return by train,
But he'd not leave his boat;
And so his mates set sail
(The season just begun,
And catches heavier than they'd been for years)
And brought him home.
And, when the "Ella" neared the harbour,
He left his bunk, and took the tiller,
And brought her in himself.
Though, in his heart, he knew it was the last time,
Yet he'd a smile for us;
And when the boat was berthed,
He looked my mother bravely in the eyes,

And clasped her hand and they went home together.
He never rose again:
The doctors could do nothing:
But he was brave and gay until the end;
And always smiled, and said 't did not hurt,
Although his teeth were clenched
And his strong fingers clutched the bedclothes tightly.

William. And you're his daughter, wife!

Hester. But I've cried out before I'm hurt too sorely.
Next week, the doctors said, it might have been . . .
It's taken in the nick of time,
And I will soon be well again,
Folk go through such and worse, each day:
It's naught to make a fuss about.
I've only one more night to bear the pain . . .
And then . . .

William. Aye, wife, you'll soon be well again,
With such a heart in you.
And yet. if you had gone too long . . .
You should have told me at the first
And let us fend . . .

Hester. My father brought his boat in.

(*The inner door opens, and* Letty *stands in the doorway, in her nightdress.*)

Letty. Is mother not home yet?
Oh, there you are!
You stayed so long to-night,
I've been asleep and dreaming!
Oh, such a dreadful dream!
I dreamt that you . . .
But you are safe and sound!
You are not ailing, mother?

Hester. Lass, I'm as well as I have been for years,
But you'll catch cold!
You'd better get to bed again.

Letty. But I shall dream.

Hester. Nay, you'll sleep sound, to-night.

(Letty *kisses her father and mother good-night, and goes back to the bedroom.*)

RUPERT BROOKE.

I.

Your face was lifted to the golden sky
Ablaze beyond the black roofs of the square,
As flame on flame leapt, flourishing in air
Its tumult of red stars exultantly,
To the cold constellations dim and high;
And as we neared, the roaring ruddy flare
Kindled to gold your throat and brow and hair
Until you burned, a flame of ecstasy.

The golden head goes down into the night
Quenched in cold gloom—and yet again you stand
Beside me now with lifted face alight,
As, flame to flame, and fire to fire you burn . . .
Then, recollecting, laughingly you turn,
And look into my eyes and take my hand.

II.

Once in my garret—you being far away
Tramping the hills and breathing upland air,
Or so I fancied—brooding in my chair,
I watched the London sunshine feeble and grey
Dapple my desk, too tired to labour more,
When, looking up, I saw you standing there,
Although I'd caught no footstep on the stair,
Like sudden April at my open door.

Though now beyond earth's farthest hills you fare,
Song-crowned, immortal, sometimes it seems to me
That, if I listen very quietly,
Perhaps I'll hear a light foot on the stair,
And see you, standing with your angel air,
Fresh from the uplands of eternity.

RETREAT.

Broken, bewildered by the long retreat
Across the stifling leagues of southern plain,
Across the scorching leagues of trampled grain,
Half-stunned, half-blinded, by the trudge of feet
And dusty smother of the August heat,
He dreamt of flowers in an English lane,
Of hedgerow flowers glistening after rain—
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet.

All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet—
The innocent names kept up a cool refrain—
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet,
Chiming and tinkling in his aching brain,
Until he babbled like a child again—
"All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet."

FOR G.

All night under the moon
  Plovers are flying
Over the dreaming meadows of silvery light,
Over the meadows of June,
  Flying and crying—
Wandering voices of love in the hush of the night.

All night under the moon,
  Love, though we're lying
Quietly under the thatch, in silvery light
Over the meadows of June
  Together we're flying—
Rapturous voices of love in the hush of the night.

LAMENT.

We who are left, how shall we look again
Happily on the sun, or feel the rain,
Without remembering how they who went
Ungrudgingly, and spent
Their all for us, loved, too, the sun and rain?

A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings—
But we, how shall we turn to little things
And listen to the birds and winds and streams
Made holy by their dreams,
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things?

THE NEWS.

The buzzer boomed, and instantly the clang
Of hammers dropt, just as the fendered bow
Bumped with soft splash against the wharf,
  —though now

Again within the Yard a hammer rang—
A solitary hammer striking steel
Somewhere aloft—and strangely, stridently
Echoed as though it struck the steely sky,
The low, cold, steely sky. She seemed to feel
That hammer in her heart—blow after blow
In a strange, clanging hollow seemed to strike
Monotonous, unrelenting, cruel-like—
Her heart that such a little while ago
Had been so full, so happy with its news
Scarce uttered even to itself. It stopt,
That dreadful hammer. And the silence dropt
Again a moment. Then a clatter of shoes
And murmur of voices as the men trooped out;
And as each wife with basket and hot can
Hurried towards the gate to meet her man,
She, too, ran forward, and then stood in doubt
Because among them all she could not see
The face that usually was first of all
To meet her eyes. Against the grimy wall
That towered black above her to the sky,
With trembling knuckles to the cold stone pressed
Till the grit seemed to eat into the bone,
And her stretched arm to shake the solid stone,
She stood, and strove to calm her troubled breast—
Her breast, whose trouble of strange happiness,
So sweet and so miraculous, as she
Had stood among the chattering company
Upon the ferry-boat, to strange distress
Was changed. An unknown terror seemed to lie
For her behind that wall, so cold and hard
And black above her, in the unseen Yard,
Dreadfully quiet now. Then with a sigh
Of glad relief she ran towards the gate
As he came slowly out, the last of all.
The terror of the hammer and the wall
Fell from her as, a woman to her mate,
She moved with happy heart and smile of greeting—
A young and happy wife whose only thought
Was whether he would like the food she'd brought—
Whose one desire, to watch her husband eating.
With a grave smile he took his bait from her,
And then without a word they moved away
To where some grimy baulks of timber lay
Beside the river, and 'twas quieter
Than in the crowd of munching, squatting men

And chattering wives and children. As he ate,
With absent eyes upon the river set,
She chattered, too, a little now and then
Of household happenings ; and then silently
They sat and watched the grimy-flowing stream,
Dazed by the stunning din of hissing steam
Escaping from an anchored boat hard by,
Each busy with their own thoughts, who till now
Had shared each thought, each feeling, speaking out
Easily, eagerly, without a doubt,
As happy, innocent children, anyhow,
The innermost secrets of their wedded life.
So as the dinner-hour went quickly by
They sat there for the first time, troubled, shy—
A silent husband and a silent wife.
But she was only troubled by excess
Of happiness ; and as she watched the stream,
She looked upon her life as in a dream,
Recalling all its tale of happiness
Unbroken and unshadowed since she'd met
Her man the first time, eighteen months ago . . .

A keen blue day with sudden flaws of snow
And sudden sunshine, when she first had set
Her wondering eyes upon him—gaily clad
For football in a jersey green and red,
Knees bare beneath white shorts, his curly head
Wind-blown and wet—and knew him for her lad.
He strode towards her down the windy street—
The wet, grey pavements flashing sudden gold,
And gold the unending coils of smoke that rolled
Unceasingly overhead, fired by a fleet,
Wild glint of glancing sunlight. On he came
Beside her brother—still a raw, uncouth
Young hobbledehoy—a strapping, mettled youth
In the first pride of manhood, that wild flame
Touching his hair to fire, his cheeks aglow
With the sharp stinging wind, his arms aswing ;
And as she watched, she felt the tingling sting
Of flying flakes, and in a whirl of snow
A moment he was hidden from her sight.
It passed, and then before she was aware,
With white flakes powdering his ruddy hair
He stood before her, laughing in the light,
In all his bravery of red and green
Snow-sprinkled ; and she laughed too. In the sun
They laughed : and in that laughter they were one.

Now, as with kindled eyes on the unseen
Grey river she sat gazing, she again
Lived through that moment in a golden dream . . .
And then quite suddenly she saw the stream
Distinct in its cold, grimy flowing—then
The present with its deeper happiness
Thrilled her afresh—this wonder strange and new—
This dream in her young body coming true,
Incredible, yet certain none-the-less—
This news, scarce broken to herself, that she
Must break to him. She longed to see his eyes
Kindle to hear it, happy with surprise
When she should break it to him presently.

But she must wait a while yet. Still too strange,
Too wonderful for words, she could not share
Even with him her secret. He sat there
So quietly, little dreaming of the change
That had come over her—but when he knew!
For he was always one for bairns, was John,
And this would be his own, their own. There shone
A strange new light on all since this was true,
All, all seemed strange, the river and the shore,
The barges and the wharves with timber piled,
And all her world familiar from a child,
Was as a world she'd never seen before.

And he, too, sat with eyes upon the stream
Remembering that day when first the light
Of her young eyes with laughter sparkling bright
Kindled to his; and as he caught the gleam
The life within him quickened suddenly
To fire, and in a world of golden laughter
They stood alone together; and then after,
When he was playing with his mates and he
Hurtled headlong towards the goal, he knew
Her eyes were on him; and for her alone,
Who had the merriest eyes he'd ever known,
He played that afternoon. Though until then
He'd only played to please himself, somehow
She seemed to have a hold upon him, now,
No longer a boy, a man among grown men,
He'd never have a thought apart from her,
From her, his mate . . . And then that golden
night
When, in a whirl of melody and light,
Her merry brown eyes flashing merrier,

They rode together in a gilded car
That seemed to roll for ever round and round
In a blind blaze of light and blare of sound
For ever and for ever, till afar
It seemed to bear them from the surging throng
Of lads and lasses happy in release
From the week's work in yards and factories—
For ever through a land of light and song
While they sat, rapt in silence, hand in hand,
And looked into each other's merry eyes,
They two, together, whirled through Paradise
A golden, glittering, unearthly land,
A land where light and melody were one,
And melody and light, a golden fire
That ran through their young bodies, and desire,
A golden music streaming from the sun,
Filling their veins with golden melody
And singing fire . . . And then when quiet fell,
And they together, with so much to tell,
So much to tell each other instantly,
Left the hot throng and roar and glare behind
Seeking the darker streets, and stood at last
In a dark lane where footsteps seldom passed,
Lit by a far lamp and one glowing blind
That seemed to make the darkness yet more dark
Between the cliffs of houses, black and high,
That soared above them to the starry sky,
A deep blue sky where spark on fiery spark
The stars for them were kindled, as they raised
Their eyes in new-born wonder to the night ;
And in a solitude of cold starlight
They stood alone together, hushed, and gazed
Into each other's eyes until speech came ;
And underneath the stars they talked and talked . . .
Then he remembered how they two had walked
Along a beach that was one golden flame
Of yellow sand beside a flame-blue sea
The day they wedded, that strange day of dream,
One flame of blue and gold . . . The murky stream
Flowed once again before his eyes, and he
Dropt back into the present ; and he knew
That he must break the news that suddenly
Had come to him last night as drowsily
He lay beside her—startling, stern and true

Out of the darkness flashing. He must tell
How, as he lay beside her in the night,
His heart had told him he must go and fight,
Must throw up everything he loved so well
To go and fight in lands across the sea
Beside the other lads—must throw up all,
His work, his home . . . The shadow of the wall
Fell on her once again, and stridently
That hammer struck her heart, as from the stream
She raised her eyes to his, and saw their flame—
Then back into her heart her glad news came
As John smiled on her ; and her golden dream
Once more was all about her as she thought
Of home, the new home that the future held
For them,—they three together. Fear was quelled
By this new happiness that all unsought
Had sprung from the old happiness . . . And he,
Watching her, thought of home too. When he stept
With her across the threshold first, and slept
That first night in her arms so quietly,
For the first time in all his life he'd known
All that home meant, or nearly all—for yet
Each night brought him new knowledge as she met
Him, smiling on the clean, white, threshold stone,
When he returned from labour in the Yard . . .
And she'd be waiting for him soon, while he
Was fighting with his fellows oversea—
She would be waiting for him . . . It was hard
For him that he mst go, as go he must,
But harder far for her: things always fell
Harder upon the women. It was well
She didn't dream yet . . . He could only trust
She, too, would feel that he had got to go,
Then 'twould not be so hard to go, and yet . . .
Dreaming, he saw the lamplit table, set
With silver pot, and cups and plates, aglow
For tea in their own kitchen bright and snug,
With her behind the teapot—saw it all,
The coloured calendars upon the wall,
The bright fire-irons, and the gay hearthrug
She'd made herself from gaudy rags ; his place
Awaiting him, with something hot-and-hot—
His favourite sausages as like as not,
Between two plates for him—as, with clean face

Glowing from washing in the scullery,
And such a hunger on him, he would sink
Content into his chair . . . 'Twas strange to think
All this was over, and so suddenly—
'Twas strange, and hard . . . Still gazing on the stream,
Her thoughts, too, were at home. She heard the patter
Of tiny feet beside her, and the chatter
Of little tongues . . . Then loudly through their dream
The buzzer boomed ; and all about them rose
The men and women : soon the wives were on
The ferry-boat, now puffing to be gone ;
The husbands hurrying, ere the gates should close,
Back to the Yard. . . . She, in her dream of gold,
And he, in his new desolation, stood.
Then soberly, as wife and husband should,
They parted, with their news as yet untold.

THE DREADNOUGHT.

Breasting the tide of the traffic, the "Dreadnought" comes,
Beribboned and gay, the first of the holiday brakes,
Brimful of broken old women, a parish's mothers,
Bearing them out for the day from grey alleys and slums—
A day in the forest of Epping grown green for their sakes.

Listless and stolid they crouch, everlastingly tired,
Mere bundles of patience outworn, half-deaf and half-blind,
Save only one apple-cheeked grannie, more brisk than the others,
Who, remembering, with youth in her eyes and the old dreams desired,
Sits kissing her hand to the drivers who follow behind.

PRELUDE TO *BORDERLANDS.*

So long had I travelled the lonely road,
  Though, now and again, a wayfaring friend
Walked shoulder to shoulder, and lightened the load,
I often would think to myself as I strode,
  No comrade will journey with you to the end.

And it seemed to me, as the days went past,
  And I gossiped with cronies, or brooded alone,
By wayside fires, that my fortune was cast
To sojourn by other men's hearths to the last,
  And never to come to my own hearthstone.

The lonely road no longer I roam.
  We met, and were one in the heart's desire.
Together we came, through the wintry gloam,
To the little old house by the cross-ways, home ;
  And crossed the threshold, and kindled the fire.

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